

EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURES POLICY

**Approved by Board of Governors: January 2016**

**To be reviewed: As guidance is updated by EA**

**RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND TO POLICY**

An exceptional closure is unplanned, and is due to unforeseen circumstances such as adverse weather conditions, power failure, or situations, which affect the safety of pupils and staff.

Exceptional Closures require approval from the Department of Education, to allow a school to reduce the number of days on which it is operational to below 200.

The following document outlines the procedures that will be followed by the Belfast Model School for Girls in such circumstances.

The Principal will use the Department of Education checklist (see below) and apply the policy as far in advance of possible closure as possible. This will allow early communication with both parents and staff.

The decision to close will preferably be made the night before closure if circumstances allow and if all the indications are that adverse conditions will continue overnight.

However, if there are doubts whether the conditions will persist, DE guidance is for the Principal to defer the decision until early morning.

**When considering whether to close the Principal will take into account the following general factors. More comprehensive information is provided in Table B.**

* Will pupils and staff be able to access the school building safely?
* Would it be possible to evacuate pupils and staff in an emergency?
* What are the implications for transport, will buses, meal deliveries, etc., be able to reach the school, particularly if the unforeseen circumstances affect a large proportion of pupils?
* If only a limited number of staff and pupils can attend, is the Pupil Teacher Ratio acceptable?

**NB;** Our maximum classroom size is 35. Large spaces are the dinning hall, common room and hall but these do not allow for effective teaching and learning and as such the school would not be open for its purpose if large numbers of pupils were put in these areas owing to staff shortages because of an inability to commute due to adverse weather. Therefore the maximum Pupil Teacher Ratio in the eventuality of an exceptional closure is 1:35 if effective Teaching and Learning is to be maintained, albeit with some amendments to normal timetables to take into account practical subjects and safe working class sizes.

**If a decision is made to close;**

* The agreed means of communications will be implemented to advise and keep informed; parents, staff, EA and the Department of Education. The DENI school reference number will be quoted in all correspondence – See Table A for a detailed plan of Communication protocols in the event of an Exceptional School Closure.
* Notices will be placed on our website, twitter, Facebook. An email and a text message will be sent to parents and staff. We will also endeavour to get notices on local radio.
* If possible, updates will be provided for parents/staff at a later time in the day with a view to the “next day” so that all have time to make suitable family arrangements.
* We will undertake the same process the same evening in respect of closure the next day. The latest this decision will be taken is 4pm and communicated by 5pm.
* The telephone tree is for the flow of information from the Principal, not back to the Principal. Therefore if a decision is taken to re-open, staff who live outside the area of the school who feel they cannot travel to work owing to local road or weather conditions should contact MRS CAMPBELL or MR WRIGHT ONLY by telephone.

**Table A – Communication Plan in the event of a School Closure**

**The Principal will contact:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **First Contact** | **Deputy Contact**  **(If first contact is not available)** | | **The Contact will:** |
| DE at curriculum.supportteam@deni.gov.uk | | | |
| The Chair of the Board of Governors | | | |
| Miss McClelland | | Mrs Tumilson | Send text messages and emails to parents to advise of closure and update later in the day |
| Ms McLaren | | Mr Wright | Contact school transport, catering and cleaning services |
| Mr Fenton | | Ms McLaren | Update; the Website, Twitter and Facebook |
| The SLT – Mr Wright  Mrs Logan  Mrs Leitch  Ms Boyd  Mrs Graham  Mrs Campbell  Mrs Houston | |  | Will enact the telephone tree |
| The BBC by email and complete the school closure via the MySchool Function | | | |
| The Education Authority – School Link Officer | | | |

**PRACTICES RELATING TO EXCEPTIONAL CLOSURE FOR SEVERE WEATHER**

In preparation to plan to deal with a possible Exceptional Closure due to severe weather.

**To be ready for exceptional closure the school will;**

* Maintain up to date contact details for all parents, staff and relevant EA/DENI staff and the EAs’ School Transport Service.
* Have procedures in place to ensure that the Principal and staff have an effective means of 2-way communication to determine the level of attendance.
* Prepare a risk assessment, which considers the foreseeable risks at times of severe weather.
* Prepare and maintain local contact details for the following services:
* Meteorological Service
* N.I Water
* Road Service
* Education Authority
* Department of Education

**To be ready for exceptional closure Ameyfm will;**

* Check and maintain appropriate levels of fuel oil.
* Check fuel level frequently during severe weather periods.
* Ensure that heating, lighting and water services are regularly maintained.
* Regularly report maintenance issues.
* Maintain sufficient supplies of salt for application to footpaths and driveways.
* Where mechanical salt spreaders are needed ameyfm will ensure they are functioning and available.
* Maintain stocks of salt and Safety Signs /Hazard Warning Tapes for cordoning off hazardous areas.
* Maintain adequate supplies of warning cones/signs/tape and mops and wet trip mats to avoid slips, trips and falls.

**Points that the Principal will consider before opening the school;**

* The decision to open the school, or to continue to operate the school will be made by the Principal (or in his absence the VP), following the carrying out of a risk assessment.
* The risk assessment will be reviewed and updated in the light of changes in the weather and circumstances.
* The following points are the key considerations that will be taken into account when determining whether to open or close the school.

Table B: Factors that influence an Exceptional Closure

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Main points to consider** | **Related issues to take into account.** |
| Is the school building accessible? | * What are the forecasted long-term weather   conditions?   * Are there any N. Ireland Met Office warnings   available? |
| Are there any areas within the school locality especially impassable or dangerous in times of extreme bad weather? | * Consideration should be given to getting to and from the school. * There may be locations on the journey where   snow/ice is known to cause early closure of roads.   * Alternative routes where possible should be   identified prior to extreme bad weather to help the traveller to decide their route. |
| Are vehicle routes into the school grounds passable? | * Is there means to improve access prior to staff, pupils, and visitors arriving? * Is parking possible outside the school grounds until remedial action has been taken to make the area passable? * If a main pedestrian route, inside the school grounds, is through a vehicle parking area then vehicles should be excluded. There may be a need for signage to this effect. |
| Are pedestrian routes on the school grounds passable? | * Is there means to clear these routes, e.g. salt/grit? * If required, can movement to various parts of the school be limited without disruption; ensuring maintenance is concerted to general access routes? * Can priority be made in respect to slopes, steps or ramps, or can these areas be restricted from use? * Outside metal staircases should also be avoided   unless appropriately treated.   * If open, vehicle parking areas should have a   passable pedestrian route to access the school |
| Can the Principal gain enough teaching and/or supervisory staff to operate safely? | * The emphasis would be to operate safely. * The acceptable Pupil Teacher Ratio for the maintainence of Teaching and Learning is 1:32 |
| Is the school appropriately heated? | * Are fuel supplies adequate? * Have there been previous failures of the heating system in autumn/winter months? * Is the means for remedial action readily available? |
| Are water systems working appropriately? | * Are there known faults in times of severe weather? |
| Can the level of heating be  Maintained throughout the school day/week? | * At times of severe weather consider running the heating system during periods of closure or holidays. * Is frost protection installed and utilised? |
| **Main points to consider** | **Related issues to take into account.** |
| Can the school grounds be maintained to effect opening the following day? | * Pedestrian walkways should be a priority, over   vehicle parking, but in the long term parking areas inside the school should be treated, or cleared of snow.   * Persons who have parked in the school grounds should be aware of the priority and told to take care in this area. * Maintenance should be a priority where pedestrian walkways also coincide with vehicle areas. * Alternatively, restrictions could be made on pedestrians, or cars stopped from entering that area. |
| Monitor the weather situation locally and through the media. | * Government Agencies such as the Roads Service may be able to provide information regarding road clearance, providing assurance of home journeys, or return journeys the following day. * Met Office provide flash weather warnings |
| Are maintenance materials and personnel available to ensure the school can eliminate, reduce or isolate risk throughout the school day? | * Can similar provision be assured for the following day(s)? * Salt/grit spread on walkways or other areas at the end of the day could limit icing. This could also prevent a further snowfall from taking a foothold and re-icing. * Slush or water from thawed snow/ice should be   cleared as much as possible to prevent re-icing.   * Iced slush could be more dangerous than the initial fall as surfaces may be uneven and more slippery |

**Risk Assessment: Severe weather - Ice/Snow**

The following Risk Assessment along with the information in the previous steps is intended to assist the Principal to gauge the risks involved before making a decision whether to close/keep open the school in adverse conditions.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ACTIVITY** | **HAZARD** | **PERSONS AT RISK** | **CONTROL MEASURES** | **RELATED ISSUES** |
| Getting to the school | Dangerous travel in  Extreme bad weather conditions. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors. Contractors, parents/carer | Principal monitors Weather conditions & warnings. No travel should be considered in the event of extreme bad weather warning, or if advice is given for only essential journeys to be undertaken. | Rural location of school personnel. Regional warnings may not be accurate at local level, so local media broadcasts may also help. |
| Travel via known areas of expected  road closure or steep gradients. | Dangerous travel in  Extreme bad Weather conditions. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors. contractors,  parents/carer | Prior planning by staff regarding alternative ‘main Road routes, or rail, to school location. | Principal to consider what is reasonable based on locality and staff. |
| Main entrance  into school grounds. | Entrance not possible. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors contractors,  parents/carer | Park car outside school until  clearance can be made | Signage on main entrance, or other entrances if prohibited from entry due to ice or other obstruction |
| Main entrance  into school grounds. | Entrance an  immediate slip hazard. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors contractors,  parents/carer | Clearance of slip hazard, unless alternative route found.  Other routes may be prioritised and cause closure of the main entrance. Salt/grit may be adequate but manual work may also be required to clear snow/ice if this is the main and only entrance. | If entrance is used by both vehicles and pedestrians,  salting/gritting may  be a priority. Cars may be stopped from entry to give priority to pedestrians and  avoid risk. |
| Getting  appropriate  members of  staff to open  school. | Inadequate  supervision | GMS staff, pupils, | A means of communicating with school staff in order to establish their attendance on the day of extreme bad  weather.  A means to communicate with  school bus service, local authority and local bus service  operators to establish pupil  means of getting to school.  Maximum Pupil Teacher Ratio 1:32 to maintain effective pedagogy | The emphasis should be on how to operate safely, not whether a full and normal curriculum could be followed. |
| Access to  school  buildings. | Slips, trips  or falls. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors contractors,  parents/carer  s and pupils | Salting/gritting could be undertaken when snow or ice is foreseeable.  Salt/grit spreading on pedestrian walkways and snow clearance where  reasonable.  Whenever possible, slopes, steps, should not be used.  However if appropriately treated, these pedestrian walkways should be no different from a treated path.  The Principal to determine which walkways should be used and treated first. | Extreme bad weather is generally forecast, although  snow/ice can be worse or less than expected, depending on local geography.  .Other routes could be signed to prevent use.  Treatment of inner areas such as courtyards, yards, or some walkways between buildings may be less of a priority. |
| Heating and Welfare  facilities. | Cold – below permitted work level  No sanitary or drinking  water. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors contractors,  parents/carer  s and pupils | Constant heating throughout periods of known cold snaps to prevent frozen pipes.  Maintenance of water systems, for example prompt repair of leaks and  drips. Regular maintenance staff checks to ensure heating and water  systems are working well. | If the school premises cannot be heated or provision of water for sanitary use or drinking cannot be made within school hours  then the school may have to close. |
| Keeping the school open. | Slips, trips or falls of  pupils at break-time/ lunch time. | GMS staff, pupils, | No use of yards and other external areas, when snow/ice cannot be easily removed or reduced.  If there are external areas free or generally free of snow/ice,  Supervised outdoor play/break may be undertaken.  The supervision level should be  higher and running prohibited.  Any areas of snow/ice remaining should be avoided and managed.  Pupils should be informed of restrictions. | Certain areas could be cordoned off and managed through salting/gritting prior to releasing for use. Melted snow/ice can refreeze so  continued attention  may be needed.  If yard space is restricted then  staggered breaks could be  undertaken.  However could this system be  Appropriately supervised? |
| Keeping the school open. | Further snow or ice, or icing of previous  fall. | GMS staff, pupils, Ameyfm staff, EA staff. Visitors contractors,  parents/carer  s and pupils | Principal to monitor the weather conditions through the Met Office and local media. information may also be gained from the EA  Further salt/grit could be used on walkways and other areas to minimise for the next day. Surface water could be brushed to drains to avoid icing up over night.  Maintain walkways and key roadways. | Further stock of salt/grit could be organised. Maintenance could be undertaken on water/heating systems to ensure they work effectively. |

**KEY WEBSITES AND CONTACTS**

NI Met Office www.**metoffice**.gov.uk

NI Roads Service www.**roads**ni.gov.uk

NI Water www.**niwater**.com

Police Service for Northern Ireland 0845 600 8000 www.**psni**.police.uk

NI Fire and Rescue Service

Education Authority Belfast Region, Gerry McGuinness [Gerry.McGuinness@belb.co.uk](mailto:Gerry.McGuinness@belb.co.uk)

Tel: 02890 564026

Education Authority Helpdesk 028 9050 7508 / 028 9050 7509

Translink Short Strand Depot [028 9045 8484](javascript:void(0))

**ORGANISATION NAME OF CONTACTS CONTACT DETAILS WEBSITE**

Department of Education Curriculum Support Team curriculum.supportteam@deni.gov.uk

Tel: 02891 279533

www.**deni**.gov.uk